

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio**  
**Memorial Mass for Father Capodanno**  
**Thursday 1 of Week XXII**



“Endure joyfully whatever may come, giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light.” St. Paul describes well what a person is able to do once he has discovered Christ and made Him the center of existence and the significant person behind every choice and every decision. He and St. Luke enrich our understanding about the challenges of discipleship and the richness of life in Christ.

Indeed the word of God today invites us to depart from the narrowness of human limits so as to be in better shape to embrace the infinity of divine love. To live in Christ in the totality of His revelation to us includes the commitment to assume the newness of life, which Christ preached and announced with His cross. The ability to move beyond our limits has always been and remains a challenge for us. Is that not why we honor St. Gregory the Great? Is it not why we remember Father Vincent Capodanno? Do they not teach us to surpass human limits, assume the newness of life, and set out into the deep?

The message of Paul to Colossians continues as a prayer which will conclude in the great Christological hymn in the next verses. He begs for them the gift of a deep knowledge of the will of God. It indicates a passage into a new level of understanding.

Knowledge here is not Gnostic, but describes knowing how to walk in a way worthy of the Lord, grateful in all things, active in accomplishing good works, and exhibiting strength and patience. These actions indicate an itinerary of conversion. This is the authentic superior knowledge which results in liberation and redemption.

The Christian is called not merely to a knowing, but to the participation in a new Exodus that establishes belonging to the people of God. As Seneca wrote: “What is important is not what you are called to endure, but the way you endure it.”<sup>1</sup> Is this way not what attracts us to the figure of Father Capodanno?

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<sup>1</sup> Seneca, A Lucilio, II, 4.

Several Marines and soldiers endured many trials in Vietnam and elsewhere in the long and noble history of the US Armed Forces. Their commitment to enduring values and military virtues demands our admiration and gratitude. We are moved by such proud traditions of valor and service. However, we single out a figure such as Father Capodanno for his exceptional willingness to care for his Marines under fire.

He brought them the consolation of the sacraments, which only a priest could do, but he also offered human compassion. Ray Harton who has journeyed to be here this evening has testified to that consoling presence on the battlefield. “Stay quiet, Marine. You will be O.K.”<sup>2</sup> are the Servant of God’s last recorded words. They communicate hope and trust in the saving power of the Lord.

St. Paul wrote about Redemption as the passage from the power of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son, where the Kingdom indicates the real power of Christ over those who are introduced into His community. There any power of darkness has been overcome by the radical victory of Christ. Our deep sense of gratitude for the gift of Redemption should be expressed by renewal in our life.

Meeting Christ provokes an examination of where we are and where we hope to progress. If the Cause for the canonization of the Servant of God has been introduced, it is because of what he can teach us. Will his life and death stimulate a growth in holiness, a steadfastness in faith, and an imitation of his example of charity?

What did we just hear in the Gospel? It is the account of an encounter with Christ. There is a response of the Apostles, voiced by Peter, the rock. He will serve as a model for the Apostolic College. Sometimes it will be a good example, sometimes bad. He will exhibit impulses and fears and offer a type for every disciple of Jesus Christ. St. Gregory the Great, one of his successors, will continue that tradition by promoting reform, sending missionaries to England, and offering an excellent example of pastoral governance.

Yet the Gospel this evening offers great contrast. Picture the fishermen, tempered by years of experience, who return to shore with the bitter taste of a toil-filled night in their mouths and empty nets. They have labored since boyhood to extract meager rations from the sea. They are met by a young Rabbi, the son of a carpenter, the quintessential example of land folk, who tells them to put back out.

Peter experiences doubt—could He be right? In that space, a trickle of faith enters into his heart, which will change Peter’s life forever.

A miraculous catch of fish provokes Peter to a confession, a self-identification as a sinner. He admits his limits, questions his absolute certainties, and restores primacy to God who has drawn near in Jesus. Who gives them a charge and their response is swift, generous, and absolute (they left all), unconditional, as was the action of salvation in their lives.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel L. Mode, *The Grunt Padre*, p. 133.

Whoever truly meets the Lord Jesus cannot stay in the same rut. He or she must move forward in new, uncharted waters. Faced with the manifestation of the omnipotence of the Lord, Peter recognizes his impotence. Jesus' action fills his deepest expectations and touches Peter's humanity in the depths of his experience. Kneeling before the Lord, Peter strips away the mask and opens the way for the improvisation of God. There is a new beginning, true conversion, a small exodus that fills habitual activities with new meaning.

As Pope Benedict XVI taught: "The school of faith is not a triumphal march but a journey marked daily by suffering and love, trials and faithfulness."<sup>3</sup>

We ask St. Gregory the Great to guide our decisions. Remember: at the root of Father Capodanno's request to serve as a Navy chaplain is some friction with a superior in Taiwan that led to his transfer to Hong Kong. There he met many Marines and heard the voice of the Lord calling him to a new vocation in his initial sacerdotal calling.

Personally, I find this mingling of the Memorial of St. Gregory the Great with our annual perfect prayer for Father Capodanno very attractive. The diplomatic service of the Holy See, where I spent twenty-five years of my priesthood, looks to this St. Gregory, as one of the first emissaries of the Holy Father. By definition a diplomat is one sent.

The Servant of God was also sent to serve as a Catholic priest and chaplain to men in battle. Each one of us is sent by Christ to put out into the deep, *duc in altum*, to make His Name known. Each one responds according to his or her state in life. I find it significant that the community of faith continues to celebrate and be inspired by the example and writings of a man who died in 604, 1,411 years ago. May the example and heroic deeds of Father Capodanno serve to inspire generations of chaplains, Marines, and men and women of good will everywhere for generations to come.

The great minister Dietrich Bonhöffer wrote: "Now belief was no longer to live in silence and wait, but rather to set off and follow [Jesus]. Now His invitation to follow Him loosed all preceding bonds to be bound only to Jesus Christ. Now all the bridges had to be broken. It was necessary to take the step into the infinite uncertainty in order to recognize what Jesus asks and what He gives."<sup>4</sup>

That is indeed what St. Paul told the Colossians at the beginning of his letter to them. "Endure joyfully whatever may come, giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light." That is the profound lesson of Father Capodanno. May we be imitators of him.

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, General Audience, 24.V.06.

<sup>4</sup> D. Bonhöffer cited in *Lezionario Meditato*, 7 p. 75.